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CONTENT ANALYSIS: VOLUNTEERED COMMENTS ON NOVEMBER 1977 OFFICER EDUCATION AND TRAINING SURVEY

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Sally J. Van Nostrand
Army Research Institute

and

Thomas C. Wyatt and Anthony A. Hickey
Empirical Research, Inc.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SOLDIER PRODUCTIVITY TECHNICAL AREA

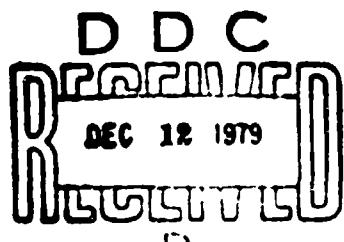
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Sally J. Van Nostrand

Thomas C. Watt Anthony A. Hickey
Technical Research

Francis P. Medland, Work Unit Leader

(14)

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Approved by:

Submitted as complete and
technically accurate, by

Cecil D. Johnson
Cecil D. Johnson

Technical Area Chief

E. Ralph Dusak, Director
Individual Training and Performance
Research Laboratory

Joseph Zeidner, Technical Director (Designate)
U.S. Army Research Institute for the
Behavioral and Social Sciences

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CONTENT ANALYSIS: VOLUNTEERED COMMENTS ON NOVEMBER 1977 OFFICER EDUCATION AND TRAINING SURVEY

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Department of the Army conducted a questionnaire survey of samples of officers and warrant officers to obtain their attitudes and perceptions on Army officer education and training policies. This survey, conducted in November 1977, mailed to about 14,500 officers and warrant officers, produced about 7800 responses.

a. The officer version of the survey consisted of a series of questions on the background characteristics of the respondent, followed by ninety-three questions on experiences, aspirations, and attitudes about the career progression system, with multiple alternatives from which the respondent was to select the most appropriate. The warrant officer version consisted of a similar series of questions on background characteristics, followed by eighty-seven questions about the warrant officer system, with multiple alternatives, but relevant to the warrant officer experiences, aspirations and attitudes.

b. In addition to the completion of the question portion of the survey, respondents were afforded opportunity for free comment on any aspect of the education and training system which they felt had not been adequately addressed, or to expand and explain their answers to specific questions. Of the 7800 returns, about 2400 officers and about 1100 warrant officers responded with additional comments.

The Army Research Institute was requested to provide Technical Advisory Service to the questionnaire proponents in the interpretation of these subjective comments through content analysis; subject categories were developed; tabulations were made of frequency of comment in these categories; and interpretation of results reported. This analysis will supplement those analyses made by the proponent agency.¹

PROCEDURE

The separation of the comments from the questionnaire data precluded opportunity to relate the volunteered comments to the individual respondents. Thus, no analyses can be made in terms of the respondents' background characteristics, experiences, and attitudes as recorded in answer to the specific questions. The analyses are constrained to frequency of volunteered responses in categories and cross-tabulations among these categories.

¹ The authors wish to acknowledge professional support in the analyses and integration of the results, from Major Richard F. Bell, Dr. Miss S. Kinzer and Dr. Seydel F. McRae, ARI.

Computer support and analyses were provided by Mr. Stanley A. Pawlowski, ARI.

Two research teams, each working independently, first reviewed a sample of comments, separately for officers and for warrant officers. From this review, each team developed a set of content categories and response alternatives for each category. The teams then discussed their separate results and developed an expanded and refined content classification scheme.

Two completely random samples for officers ($N=150$ each) and for warrant officers ($N=100$ each) were drawn from the respective populations of returned comments. Each team then utilized one sample from each group, reviewed each comment, classified it against the content scheme and recorded it in the appropriate categories. Samples were then exchanged between teams, without discussion of results, and the procedure iterated, so that each comment in the samples was subject to two separate independent analyses.

Independence between coding teams and their consistency of interpretation were of research concern in these analyses. Thus, indices of inter-team agreement, and intra-team agreement between first and second sample analyses were computed to establish a degree of confidence in the manner of interpretation and classification of these data. These comparisons were:

- a. First team compared with second team results (Inter-team agreement).
- b. Intra-team: first respondent sample results, compared with second respondent sample results.

The indices so computed -- while not so rigorously defined or computed as to meet the definition of "reliability coefficients" -- produced a high level of agreement.

RESULTS

Relatively small frequency tabulations occurred on each dimension as expected due to the nature of the open-ended question. Most respondents did not comment; of those who did, the comments dealt only with those particular items which they felt the questionnaire did not adequately address. Since there were so many possible alternatives, it is not surprising that most items were not mentioned in high frequency among the respondent total, even with a pool of 300 officer and 200 warrant officer responses to consider. Analysis of the open-ended responses had been performed in two stages: descriptive analysis of item frequencies, and contingency table analyses of selected items. Analyses were performed separately for officers and warrant officers.

The descriptive analysis is organized into the following general categories: Satisfaction with and commitment to the Army, Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS), Career Progression Inequities, Assignment/Counseling, Training, Alternate specialty and Civilian Education. Within these categories the results were as follows.

SATISFACTION WITH AND COMMITMENT TO THE ARMY

Within this category, 22% of the responses included a comment concerning commitment to the Army. Of this group, more than half (56%) were evaluated as "individual-oriented" rather than oriented to the Army. Among the warrant officers, only 12% included a comment relative to their commitment and 70% of these were "individual-oriented".

Responses were also classified in terms of the level of frustration as evidenced by the open-ended responses. Nineteen per cent of the officers responded on this dimension and 69% of those reflected either frustrated and critical attitudes or completely frustrated attitudes towards the Army career system; only 8% did not appear critical. Ten per cent of the warrant officers were coded as frustrated.

The data were analyzed in terms of the respondents' view of the Army's organizational structure (the Army viewed as a corporation contrasted to a fraternal organization). Nineteen per cent of the officers responded in this manner. Of this group, 81% commented on the corporate features of the Army that they disliked. Although fewer warrant officers included such a comment (9%), the proportion expressing dislike of the corporate features was very similar. Very few officers (5%) commented about the quality of leadership and supervision that they had experienced, but those who did respond were overwhelmingly negative. Even fewer warrant officers commented on this point, and again the comments were mainly negative.

OFFICER PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (OPMS)

Responses concerning OPMS were coded for comments about goals, implementation, objectives, system focus, and rewards. Seventeen per cent of the officers made a comment concerning the relationship between OPMS goals and the system as it is implemented, and 94% of them felt that the system does not support the goals. Ten per cent of the officers commented about the focus of the OPMS system and the responses are split as to whether the system is too generalized or too specialized. Sixty-two per cent of the officers thought that the system is too generalized. Many respondents (15%) criticized OPMS for rewarding "yes" men and "ticket punching."

CAREER PROGRESSION INEQUITIES

Four types of career progression complaints surfaced in the responses to the open-ended question. These concerned promotions, selection for schools, OERs, and the opportunity to attend graduate school. The response frequencies were:

	Officers	Warrant Officers
Promotions	17.5%	12.1%
School Selection	11.2	10.0
OER	9.2	4.7
Graduate School Opportunity	6.5	0.8

Complaints in the promotion category produced significant objections to the "up or out" requirement; in the Army schools category, the opinion that selection was a "ticket punch" rather than a verified requirement; OERs as inadequate vehicles for the administrative weight they attain; and graduate school as poorly correlated with defined Army needs, rather as opportunity for post-Army career.

ASSIGNMENT/COUNSELING

In general, both the officers and warrant officers showed a very small percentage that felt that progression opportunities were hurt because of specialties that hampered promotion. A very small percentage commented about administrative slippage in assignments. However, 20% of the officers and 21% of the warrant officers commented about assignment/counseling policies, and in both groups the comments were overwhelmingly negative. Of those who commented, 93% of the officers and 97% of the warrant officers said that the policies were poor.

In terms of the execution of the assignment/counseling system, 17% of the officers and 21% of the warrant officers were found to have a comment. Again the trend is that most respondents -- 99% of the officers and 100% of the warrant officers -- had a complaint about the execution of the system. Very few responses indicated a complaint about personnel in the Assignment/Counseling system. Six per cent of the officers and 3% of the warrant officers indicated negative experience with counseling personnel. Even fewer responses indicated that poor information about their career had been received.

TRAINING

The most obvious conclusion concerning training is that there is not enough of it. Eleven per cent of the officers and 21% of the warrant officers said that they needed more training. Some responses concerned the training that they had received in military schools. Eleven per cent of the officers and 6% of the warrant officers made comments relative to the amount of specialization apparent in the training that they had undergone. Sixty-nine percent of the officers thought that the training should be more specialized, while the percentage for the warrant officers was even higher (91%).

Of those officers and warrant officers who commented about on-the-job training (8% of the officers and 7% of the warrant officers), most wanted more on-the-job training (OJT). Although relatively few responses included a comparison between Army school training and OJT, those that made such comparisons felt that OJT was of more utility.

A number of responses indicated that they had not used their training in their job. Nine per cent of the officers and 7% of the warrant officers made this comment. Although most responses were not directed toward timeliness of Army training, 7% of the officers and almost 7% of the warrant officers felt that training was offered to them either too early or too late in their career. A common suggestion from the warrant officers was for a specific orientation program at the time of appointment, and more frequent military school training. The question of qualifying examinations was sometimes raised but opinions both pro and con were presented with about the same frequency. Frequencies are not available as this question was not one of the tabulated items.

ALTERNATE SPECIALTY

Very few responses regarding alternate specialty designation were found. Fewer than 6% of the sample responded to any of the questions in this category. Further analyses, therefore, were not pursued.

CIVILIAN EDUCATION

Eighteen per cent of both officers and warrant officers commented on the value of civilian education. Nearly 64% of the officers and 83% of the warrant officers considered civilian education valuable. However, while accepting the value of the education these respondents felt the emphasis placed on civilian education was overstressed for promotion purposes. Comments from 12% of the officers and a similar percentage from warrant officers revealed a difference of opinion. For example, of the officers responding, 68% felt civilian education was overemphasized, while only 38% of the warrant officers thought civilian education was overemphasized. Many of the warrant officers who felt civilian education was underemphasized felt the Army should offer encouragement to complete a bachelor degree. Some officers specified that the issue was not whether there should be more education but how to find time in their long and exhausting work schedule that could be spared for either resident or non-resident educational purposes. Several recommended strongly that a regular time be set aside, perhaps on a monthly basis, for officers' professional growth. During this time officers would have the opportunity to discuss their mutual problems with each other, and to learn how to deal with them better.

SPECIFIC WARRANT OFFICER REACTIONS

A number of comments specific to warrant officers were coded only for them. Nine per cent mentioned that they thought that their assignment is inconsistent with their rank. Five per cent felt that a secondary MOS assignment degrades their primary skill. Some (8%) complained that they are not always viewed as a "real" officer, and 7% said that there is too little distinction between the warrant officer ranks.

CONTINGENCY TABLE ANALYSIS

In order to assess relationships between some of the comments, contingency tables were constructed to investigate whether some remarks were related to others. It was hypothesized that remarks in different specific areas were made by the same individuals. For instance, it was discovered that most (88%) of the "individual-oriented" officers also responded about the "bad-corporate" features of the Army. Most of the complaints about promotions were made by the "individual-oriented" (62%), with school selection complaints showing a slightly lower percentage (61%). Eighty-three per cent of the complaints about the opportunity to attend graduate school come from the "individual-oriented" rather than the Army oriented respondent.

The same type of analysis was done comparing those who thought the Assignment/Counseling system policies are good with those who thought they are bad. Looking at those who thought that OPMS objectives should be changed, contingency table analyses revealed that 98% of those who thought OPMS objectives should be changed also thought that the Assignment/Counseling policies were poor. Such a relationship is not presented as a "surprise" finding, but confirmatory of the criticism of OPMS. This same group also represented 93% of those who complained about the timeliness of Army school selection. Those who complained about the timeliness of Army schooling also tended to think that the corporate features of the Army are bad. And those who thought that Army school was not timely also said that they did not use their training in their job.

Contingency table analysis reveals that those who said that the Assignment/Counseling policies were poor also said that the implementation of OPMS is not supportive of its goals.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the survey undertaken at the direction of the Chief of Staff, Army, a representative sample of commissioned officers and warrant officers were given an opportunity, not frequently available, to express their feelings and concerns about some key issues in their military career. In addition to answering standardized questions concerning education and training, respondents were invited to comment freely, and anonymously, about their experiences, expectations, and suggestions regarding officer education and training. Thirty one per cent of the officers took advantage of this opportunity and offered comments. The majority of the comments could be classified as critical of some aspect of the Army system of education and training, but less than twenty per cent expressed overall dissatisfaction with the Army. Thus, in addition to the content analyses done for this report, it is considered that a random sample of the comments received in this survey might be profitably read/reviewed within the Army staff for their value in providing new insights on policy.

Interpretation of these data, together with the conclusions, should be tempered by the knowledge that what was analyzed was an open-ended question that solicited (1) an expansion or explanation of previous answers, or (2) comments about things not asked in the questionnaire. Many were one of a kind and, therefore, meaningless for tabulation purposes. Additionally, there is no way to know the feelings of the 59% who offered no comments on the questionnaires they returned or of the group (almost half) who did not return the questionnaire they received. Conceivably their attitude could range from perfectly happy, don't change a thing to everything is so bad with the Army that there's no use trying to tell them.

The questionnaire itself generated comments from 18% of the officers and nearly that percentage of the warrant officers. Although 26% of the officers respondents stipulated that the questionnaire was useful, it should not surprise anyone that most of the other comments were negative. This type of question, at the end of the questionnaire probing a sensitive area of social experience, usually draws mostly negative responses. Therefore, one generalization which may be made from this analysis is that most areas of responses -- OPMS, training, education, etc. -- were mentioned on about 40% of those who responded with comments, and represented less than 20% of the questionnaires returned.

Of the seven broad categories of career concerns, the areas that are mentioned most frequently are OPMS and the Assignment/Counseling system. Many officers and warrant officers said that more training is desirable. Civilian education is thought to be valuable but the officers feel that civilian education should not have quite as much emphasis placed on it and the warrant officers feel they need more than the system allows for.